

PATTERNS OF COMMUNIST MILITARY ACTIVITY AND TERRORISM
SINCE NOVEMBER 1968

Summary

After a pronounced lull during the fall of 1968, the scale and scope of Communist-initiated military and terrorist activity began to pick up measurably, though not dramatically, during December 1968 and the curve is still rising. There are few exact parallels between the pattern of Communist activity since 1 November 1968 and Communist activity for the three months prior to last year's Tet offensive (Tet 1968 began on 29 January, Tet 1969 begins on 17 February). Nonetheless, aggregate data on enemy-initiated incidents, as well as information on the movements and behavior of enemy military units, strongly suggest that a major offensive is not far away. It is not certain at this time, however, that this offensive will be timed to coincide with Tet 1969, or that it will be of the scope and character of last year's attacks. It does appear that a significant build-up is under way in the III Corps area and that military units are ending their sojourn in Cambodia and moving into forward assembly areas. The size of the indicated infiltration rate could well support a Tet-like offensive, but the timing of this infiltration leaves uncertain whether the offensive is scheduled for February or March 1969. There has been no significant increase in the level of military activity detected in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), but this lack of activity neither supports nor discredits the threat of an enemy offensive in the near future.

Enemy Activity in I Corps

For the past three months, enemy activity in the I Corps Zone has been characterized by an increasing use of local force and guerrilla units in attacks by fire and harassing type actions while major enemy units have tried to avoid contact and make plans for future offensives.

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North Vietnamese Army (NVA) unit of even battalion size in the DMZ and while there are major units just north of the Ben Hai River, several days or perhaps weeks would be required to move them into positions from which they could pose any significant threat to the area. Should the enemy decide to move large forces through the DMZ, it is doubtful that such movement could be accomplished undetected.

In Quang Tri and Thua Thien, the two northernmost provinces of I Corps which the Communists have designated Military Region Tri Thien Hue (MRTTH), there has been a gradual return of several of the enemy regiments which departed for refurbishment in Laotian base areas in the fall of 1968. The North Vietnamese 6th Regiment and elements of the NVA 9th Regiment have returned to western Thua Thien where they appear to be preoccupied with the restoration of logistics facilities to support possible future military campaigns against allied positions and urban centers along the coastal lowlands. The Communists have also expanded their anti-aircraft capabilities in the A Shau Valley area, suggesting a strong enemy determination to protect their base area restoration efforts. There is also limited evidence that the North Vietnamese 90th Regiment has also returned to Thua Thien from sanctuary north of the DMZ. Only the North Vietnamese 4th and 5th Regiments are known to be currently available for renewed operations along the northern coastal plain. Their present deployment, however, does not appear to constitute a major threat to Hue or other large civil or military objectives in the area.

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In the Danang - Hoi An area,

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current positions of enemy forces make it appear that a much more serious threat exists against the Thuong Duc Special Forces Camp (SFC), 30 kilometers southwest of Danang. For the immediate future, it seems likely that the threat to Danang itself will continue to consist of rocket attacks and small-scale attacks by fire (ABF). In the Quang Ngai area, enemy attack plans are apparently under way, but as noted in other sectors, the current positions of enemy forces do not seem to make a large-scale attack imminent.

Although enemy main force units have generally tried to avoid contact and have, for the most part, simply reacted to allied operations, there has been an increased use of local force and guerrilla units in terrorist activities and attacks against population centers as the Viet Cong (VC) apparently try to maintain their presence in the countryside and hinder the accelerated pacification campaign.

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A deterrent to future enemy plans for a renewal of any major offensive may be the loss, through allied action, of significant quantities of food and other supplies. During January, forty-four caches were discovered in I Corps containing 361 tons of various types of supplies. It is not known to what extent these losses will impair enemy capabilities for mounting a sustained offensive, but it is quite conceivable that the Communist timetable will be upset.

Enemy Activity in II Corps

For the past three months, the II Corps area has generally been the quietest in the country. Most major enemy units had withdrawn to Cambodian base areas or to remote bases in South Vietnam. There were light, scattered attacks by fire and harassment of outposts, but no significant engagements.

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] enemy intentions in II Corps are somewhat obscure at the moment.

As in I Corps, the enemy lost fairly substantial quantities of supplies during January. A total of 23 caches were discovered consisting of 118 tons of food and other supplies. While this is considerably less than the discoveries in I Corps, there have generally been fewer enemy troops in II Corps and so the losses sustained may be of equal seriousness.

Enemy Activity in III Corps

In the III Corps area during this period, we have seen the enemy amass the most formidable single force anywhere in South Vietnam. Except for several isolated attacks (costly to the Communists) against relatively isolated allied installations, the enemy has largely avoided contact in III Corps. The indications are that he has been preparing his forces during this time for a period of intensified actions at times and places which have not yet been definitely fixed.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] all point toward attacks against installations and urban areas sometime in the next three to six weeks. Prisoners have related that they have undergone special training in street fighting tactics.

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is, and has been for four months, a fairly heavy concentration of enemy forces in the eastern portion of the Zone just north of the demarcation line, but no southward movement of these units has been noted.

There have been 2,303 incidents or sightings in the DMZ since the 1 November bombing halt, but these have not involved any known major enemy units. The majority of incidents or sightings have involved either small groups of men or enemy activity such as work in progress on emplacements, etc. Only 114 groups of more than 20 men have been detected to date.

Firing incidents by the enemy have been mainly against friendly aerial observers overflying the DMZ area. To date, some 123 such firing incidents have occurred -- 105 against aerial observers and the remainder against bases and installations south of the DMZ.

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Enemy Activity Levels - Parallels to Pre-Tet 1968

The aggregate statistics on attacks and other VC-initiated incidents do not point unequivocally toward a Tet-like offensive. In a broad sense, however, it is true that the Tet offensive of 1968 followed a gradual heightening of military activity subsequent to the August 1967 lull. The current data does suggest a build-up of military activity after a nadir in October. Despite the apparent unexplained month's difference -- the later

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date for Tet in 1969 can account for only half of the two-month's difference -- the slowly accelerating military activity strongly suggests that some sort of offensive is in the making.

Two factors combine to make the parallelism between Tet 1968 and Tet 1969 very tenuous. First, the absolute levels of activity are considerably lower now than they were before Tet 1968. In December 1967, for example, VC attacks totalled 277 while in December 1968 there were only 194 -- with preliminary data for January 1969 indicating not much change. Free World combat deaths in December 1967 were 2,075 while in December 1968 the figure was 1,648. Second, the pattern of aggregate statistics prior to Tet 1968 was not very distinctive and by itself was not a clear indicator of an offensive of that scope. Any parallelism, therefore, would lead to a significant degree of uncertainty even if the patterns were identical.

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